

IN THE DEFENSE OF "A GRAND OLD MAN"

Each year, just about this time, the friends of Santa Claus find it necessary to combat the efforts of those who would have the world reject the grand old man.

"The world is growing too old and too wise for Santa Claus. It has made up its mind that it will have none of him." This is a sample of the statements made by the skeptics of this period.

A New York newspaper sums up the arguments made by the enemies of Santa Claus in this way:

"It is said that Santa Claus is childish, that Santa Claus is irreligious, that Santa Claus is a delusion, that Santa Claus is trivial, silly, pagan, misleading to the mind of the child.

"Educators have denied the very existence of Santa Claus and protested against the telling of the old Santa Claus stories on the ground that they are all lies.

"Religionists have attacked him violently with the accusation that he is only a pagan myth, and that he distracts the minds of children from the real meaning and purpose of Christmas.

"The board of education has turned a cold shoulder to him. They have not forbidden him entrance to the schools, but their rules governing Christmas are all against him. They have not legislated to keep him out, but the rules against Christmas trees, the regulations forbidding any religious exercises and the growing prejudice against "school entertainments" are all conspiring to force him from the public schools.

"Even the Sunday schools—the last stronghold—have begun to frame up acts of exclusion. Some of the ministers think that the lesson of the Christmas manger is forgotten in the hope of the Christmas pack. Some of them have made the danger of fire from Christmas trees the apparent reason for excluding him from their Sunday school rooms. Others think that the money expended on the parish children could better be distributed among the abject poor.

"The truth tellers have a mighty argument built up to support their contention. They say that when the child's world is peopled with the sort of folk that one must lie awake at night to see—as one does for Santa Claus on Christmas Eve—he must grow up under the disadvantage of having at every step to free his mind from a delusion, an error, a wrong belief.

"They say that the child whose father or mother has told him that Santa Claus and the fairies really live, must, as his knowledge and experience increases, gradually grow to distrust the word of his parents, to believe himself deluded by them in other more important facts of life. They say that it is a humiliation for the child to find that a deception has been practiced upon him, just as it would for an older person. They say, moreover, that it is an insult to the intelligence of the child to ask him to place his faith in anything that is not strictly true, and they appeal to the science of ethics to prove their arguments."

After presenting in very feeble sort of way the arguments of "those who declare that Santa Claus is real," this New York newspaper concludes: "But on the whole the truth-tellers have the best of it. This is a practical age and the tendency is toward bald, bare, absolute truth in everything."

But the truth-tellers are certainly not among those who are so "all-fired" practical that they make bold, through a mistaken notion of duty, to deny the existence of Santa Claus.

According to this New York newspaper the "truth-tellers" say that "when the child's world is peopled with the sort of folk that one must lie awake at night to see—as one does for Santa Claus on Christmas Eve—he must grow up under the disadvantage of having at every step to free his mind from a delusion, an error, a wrong belief." Well, the child's world in all the years of Christendom has been peopled with just that sort of folk; in all the years of Christendom little children on Christmas Eve have shoved the "sand man" farther and farther away, and have strained their little ears in the effort to hear the footsteps of the good old Saint

whose existence, as whose coming, they have never for a moment doubted. Yet during all these years children have grown to manhood and womanhood, and they have never found themselves handicapped in the struggle with the great duties of life because they spent their childhood within the hallowed precincts where the existence of Santa Claus is recognized and the skeptic is barred.

"Kris Kringle" is the patron saint in Germany, and it is known by the well informed in that portion of the earth that he actually made his rounds on Christmas Eve and dropped down the chimney gifts for the good and obedient. In Russia it is Saint Nicholas, and it is not denied that he was a real man who lived about 300 A. D. We are told that this man was a noted bishop, whose name, because of his good deeds and generous acts, became a synonym for kindness and generosity. According to one story, this good old saint, clad in fur from top to toe, was in the habit of going around in a sleigh drawn by fleet footed reindeers. From one of his thoughtful acts came the custom of hanging up stockings on Christmas Eve. It is said that a poor nobleman in Russia, having no money with which to provide marriage dowry for his three daughters, was about to force them to support themselves by a degrading life. Saint Nicholas learning the facts, passed the nobleman's house one Christmas Eve, and threw a purse of gold, shaped as a slipper, through the window. On the following night the second daughter received a similar gift, and the third night the youngest daughter detected the good old saint throwing a stocking filled with gold into her window. In this way a dowry was provided for each daughter, and from these incidents is said to have grown the custom of placing gifts in shoes and stockings on Christmas Eve.

From these reputable ancestors the Santa Claus of today is descended.

Don't let them fool you, children! He is not a myth, the so-called truth-tellers to the contrary, notwithstanding. He is a real being who acts; and so strong is his personality, so inspiring are his characteristics, that he sways the hearts of men in every clime where the crucifix is the emblem and Christ is the Master.

Who would begrudge the world the happiness it has obtained from its conception of the generous old messenger of Christmas Eve? Who would withhold from men the inspiration Santa Claus has given? Who would tear from the life book of "of such is the kingdom of heaven" its best and brightest chapter?

Here's to Santa Claus! May his shadow never grow less! He is the annual reminder that "I am my brother's keeper." He is the walking delegate of the Brotherhood of Man. He is the living exemplar of the Sermon on the Mount; the Declaration of Independence might have been written within his tool shop; and the treaties declaring peace between warring peoples might have been framed upon his workbench.

The duties of Santa Claus are not confined to the filling of children's stockings. Where women have fallen he gives words of cheer and extends a helping hand. Where hope is dead within the breasts of men, he revives it. Where

God's creatures are naked he provides clothes; where they are hungry he gives food; where they are disconsolate, he gives encouragement. And whenever in the horizon of a life there is not to be seen a single star, he touches the situation with his magic wand and, lo and behold, in that same horizon there is not to be found a single cloud.

In the life of the adult he is a strong and permanent force, according to the alacrity with which men turn from the shadows to the sunbeams, and the earnestness with which they cultivate those habits of thought that lead men upward and onward.

In the life of the child—ah, that is where the good old saint is at his best! There he is at his best not only for the happiness he brings to the little ones, but because that happiness is of the contagious kind and results in the distribution of blessings and sunshine and in the cultivation of love and joy and optimism—even sometimes among eminently practical men and women who, mingling with the little ones as they empty their stockings on Christmas morning may learn that "it is not all of life to live, nor all of death to die."

This New York newspaper asks how it would seem to have placed over the door of the little shop at the North Pole the sign:

.....
SANTA CLAUS
FORCED OUT OF
BUSINESS
.....

When such a sign has been placed above the banking houses, the counting rooms and the factories of the land; when hope has died within the hearts of men; when love has faded from the earth; when civilization has been acknowledged a failure; when it has been conceded that might is above right; when men have turned from all that is good and noble and tender within this vale of tears, then it will be time enough to place such a sign above the workshop of this grand old man. He has done more to cultivate love and more to increase the sum of human happiness than any other brought into being since the heavenly host sang, "Glory to God in the Highest, and on Earth Peace, Good Will Toward Men," and the wise men of the east poured their treasures into the manger at Bethlehem.

RICHARD L. METCALFE.

DO EYES DECEIVE?

In his message to congress Mr. Roosevelt says: "This government stands for manhood first and for business only as an adjunct of manhood." If that means anything at all, it is a declaration in favor of "putting the man above the dollar." Now, will some of these republican editors who have so often sneered when democrats insisted that the dollar should not be placed above the man, enter their formal protest?

THE PRIMARY PLEDGE

I promise to attend all the primaries of my party to be held between now and the next Democratic National Convention, unless unavoidably prevented, and to use my influence to secure a clear, honest and straightforward declaration of the party's position on every question upon which the voters of the party desire to speak.

Signed _____

Street _____ Postoffice _____ State _____

County _____ Voting precinct or ward _____

Fill out Blanks and mail to Commoner Office, Lincoln, Nebraska.